

# An Unknowable Ideal

Objectivism as a New Religious Movement and the Subsequent Institutionalization of Ayn  
Rand's Ideas in American Politics

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## Abstract

Thirty-five years after her death, Ayn Rand is hailed by conservatives as a great defender of capitalism and liberty. Prominent Republicans including Paul Ryan, Ron Paul, and Alan Greenspan credit Rand for inspiring their political careers. The radical conservative Tea Party movement used “Who is John Galt?” a famous quote from Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), as a rallying cry against the new Obama administration. Every day, news reports about the Trump Administration feature “Ayn Rand” or “Atlas Shrugged” in their headlines.

Objectivism, Ayn Rand’s philosophy, is deeply atheist, rejects altruism, and denounces American politics. Rand called conservatives corrupt collectivists with “no goal, no direction, no political principles, no social ideals, no intellectual values, [and] no leadership to offer anyone.”<sup>1</sup> How did a woman who made these radical claims become a contemporary conservative messiah?

Rand wrote her novels and philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s, a turbulent time for the United States, especially for American youth. Millennials were in search of spiritual solutions to reconcile social injustices, new technologies, and the government’s changing role. New religious movements (NRMs) that emphasize individualism, gender equality, and scientific reconciliation became popular among the youth of the counterculture generation.

By treating Objectivism as a new religious movement and applying Weber’s theory of charismatic authority, it is evident that the Objectivist movement failed to routinize and institutionalize. Consequently, various aspects of contemporary society are able to claim Objectivists ideas without the weight of Ayn Rand’s radicalism.

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# Introduction

*Today's "conservatives" are futile, impotent and, culturally, dead. They have nothing to offer and can achieve nothing. They can only help to destroy intellectual standards, to disintegrate thought, to discredit capitalism, and to accelerate this country's uncontested collapse into despair and dictatorship.*

— Ayn Rand, "Conservatism: An Obituary," *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*

The 2008 financial crisis triggered panic across the world as American financial institutions failed, stock prices plummeted, and unemployment rates soared. Many middle-class workers who lost their jobs blamed their strife on "socialist policies" in the government. Several turned to political activism in an effort to prevent another crisis. This gave rise to a new strain of radical conservatism in the wake of the election of one of the most liberal American presidents. The Tea Party movement, a radical conservative grassroots movement, rose up and called for limiting government spending and reviving constitutional values. The rise of conservative thinking brought about the reintroduction of who many have come to view by now as a classic conservative figure, Ayn Rand.

Tea Party politician Rand Paul often talks about his commitment to Rand's work and has raved about Rand's unabashed defense of laissez-faire capitalism.<sup>ii</sup> Christian leaders speak to the holiness of capitalism and a government-level revival of Christian values. In 2013, Mark David Henderson published *The Soul of Atlas: Ayn Rand, Christianity, a Quest for Common Ground* and opened a dialogue between anti-altruist Objectivists and 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian conservatives.<sup>iii</sup>

Conservatives in the early days of the Obama administration strengthened against the Affordable Care Act, the Troubled Asset Relief Program, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Many of these people considered Ayn Rand a fellow defender of the

constitution, individual rights, limited government, and unregulated capitalism. *Atlas Shrugged* sales increased five-fold in the years following the financial crisis.

Rand's philosophy, Objectivism, advocates laissez-faire capitalism, limited government, and self-interest rooted in a moral code based on reason and the principle of "non-initiation of force." Rand despised American conservatives, libertarians, and Christians despite some shared values among the groups. She viewed conservatives as empty ideologues and libertarians as misguided capitalists. She saw all religion as denial of reason and an effort to usurp the supremacy of man. Regardless, several contemporaries from all of these groups have found comfort and power in Ayn Rand's ideas.

In 2012, The Library of Congress named *Atlas Shrugged* one of 88 books that shaped America. It is joined by the likes of "The Federalist Essays," *Walden*, *The Jungle*, *Silent Spring*, and *The Souls of Black Folks*. Initially, Ayn Rand was popular because of her literature—*The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). The novels were extraordinarily popular among young and impressionable Americans. Published during a turbulent point in American history, Rand's novels advocating self-interest, limited government, and reason, offered a solution to societal anxieties.

The 1950s and 1960s were a transformative period in American history. The United States was becoming more comfortable with its international power and enjoyed incredible economic success. Consumerism and conservative family values were emphasized. Among youth, a push for social justice, anti-establishment culture, and new age spirituality was on the rise. The beatnik and counterculture movements welcomed cultural diversity, drug use, and political activism. NRMs introduced by leaders who offered solutions to common social issues in the era became popular. Leaders offered religious practices focused on individualism, gender and class equality, scientific

reconciliation, and modes for communal living. These movements became popular places for young Americans to turn to in search of spiritual and philosophical enlightenment.

To understand Rand's popularity, I consider her as the charismatic authority of a new religious movement. Weber defines charismatic authority as "resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him."<sup>iv</sup> Charismatic leaders and NRMs are not mutually exclusive, but often NRMs have charismatic founders. Although Rand never claimed divinity, her leadership over Objectivists shaped a movement consistent with the sociological structure of NRMs that formed in the American counterculture. Objectivism offers a plan for daily living to resolve millennial anxieties in the Cold War era. Specifically, Rand gives a defense for capitalism, limited government, and self-interest that is consistent with anti-war sentiments, social justice, and individualism.

The Objectivist movement enjoyed strong membership while Ayn Rand was alive. However, the ideology failed to routinize after power was passed down. Subsequent fractures occurred in the movement between the late 1950s through the 1970s weakened Rand's NRM. The integrity of Objectivist philosophy has become obsolete, but Ayn Rand's ideas are alive and well in movements that celebrate classical liberal ideas

# Biography of Ayn Rand

## **The Birth and Death of Alissa Rosenbaum**

Ayn Rand was born Alissa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum on February 2, 1905 in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Rand's father Zinovy Zakharovich Rosenbaum, was one of few Jewish students to study at Warsaw University in the nineteenth century where he earned a degree in chemistry. With this degree, he opened a pharmaceutical chemistry shop in St. Petersburg and bought a large apartment on Nevsky Prospekt, a coveted downtown address. Alissa's mother, Anna, was an attractive, educated, bourgeoisie woman who cared for her children and kept a fully-staffed home. The family was known to celebrate major Jewish holidays and entertain friends who valued Enlightenment European culture.<sup>v</sup>

Anna and Zinovy Rosenbaum were invested in their daughters' social and academic educations. Alissa and her sisters learned French, German, gymnastics, piano, and were encouraged to read foreign literature. The girls attended Stoiunina Gymnasium, an elite, avant-garde, private school where Alissa befriended the sister of Vladimir Nabokov, with whom she recalled "a relationship based on the sharing of ideas, politics specifically."<sup>vi</sup> From a young age, Rosenbaum showed academic promise, especially in mathematics.

However, her passion was for literature. At age eight, Alissa was writing screenplays and by age ten, she was writing novels reflecting her admiration for Cyrus Paltons. Cyrus Paltons is the "tall, lean, and long-legged" hero of the French children's magazine series *The Mysterious Valley*, by Maurice Champagne.<sup>vii</sup> He is a handsome British infantry captain who wards off evil in the lush hidden valleys of the Indian Himalayas. The aesthetics of the characters and landscapes depicted in *The Mysterious Valley* are thought to have heavily influenced the handsome

protagonists that would “fight evil” in Rand’s later literature.<sup>viii</sup> Alissa’s interests began to shift toward politics in her early teens, when she first engaged in political debates at Stoionina Gymnasium.

Alissa was born in a Saint Petersburg defined by anti-Semitism and political conflict. The year of her birth, Czar Nicholas II executed “Bloody Sunday”—a mass attack against thirty thousand Russian labor reform protestors at the Winter Palace.<sup>ix</sup> In the years immediately following, Nicholas II would establish four Dumas<sup>1</sup> in the name of political reform. Saint Petersburg remained calm during this period, while the rest of Russia was consumed in massive labor strikes, peasant insurrections, and anti-Semitic violence.<sup>x</sup> In 1914, Russia would enter World War I and briefly found itself united against Germany, only to find itself engulfed in revolution before the end of the War.<sup>xi</sup>

In the years leading up to the Russian Revolution (1917), Alissa found herself favoring the democratic rhetoric of Alexander Krensky. Her reverence for Krensky continued into her later life despite her drastic ideological evolution. In 1938, Rand would send a letter along with a copy of her novel *We the Living* to Krensky, who by that time was an exile in New York. She tells him in her not, “of all the great Russian people in the world, your opinion is the most valuable to me.”<sup>xii</sup>

In the early months of 1917, the Rosenbaums remained in Saint Petersburg with hope that the liberal Provisional Government that replaced the Tsarist autocracy would stabilize their country. Unfortunately, months later, the fall of the Socialist Provisional Government to the Communist Bolsheviks in the October Revolution initiated poor fortune for the family. In the

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<sup>1</sup> A дума is a Russian legislative assembly with advisory and oversight capabilities. The first дума was formally established by Tsar Nicholas II in 1906 and was dissolved during the 1917 Russian Revolution. The дума currently functions as the lower legislative house of the Russian government (Wade 2000).

months to come Zinovy Rosenbaum lost his business and eight hundred Jews were executed. The Rosenbaums fled from Soviet Russia to the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>xiii</sup> In response to her family's suffering, Alissa declared herself atheist and committed to the belief that reason was the highest human virtue.<sup>xiv</sup>

When she arrived in Crimea, Alissa enrolled in a struggling public high school where she was far more educated than her classmates, and failed to make friends. In her spare time, she religiously followed the Revolution and began to attend anticommunist political meetings with her father. Most importantly, it was during this period that Alissa first began to develop the logical foundation of what would become Objectivism. "Her method was deduction: to grasp the stated or unstated axiom underlying a conclusion, to grasp the steps of moving from one axiom to conclusions to grasp the logical implications of the conclusion."<sup>xv</sup> This philosophy supported the young Rand's emphasis on reason and rejection of religion.

Alissa asserted her atheism was an act affirming the significance of humanity. She wrote in a dairy entry,

I had decided that the concept of God is degrading to men. Since they say God is perfect, and man can never be that perfect, then man is low and imperfect and there is something above him—which is wrong" and "no proof of the existence of God exists; the concept is an untenable invention [...] since the concept of God is rationally untenable and degrading to man, I'm against it."<sup>xvi</sup>

This conclusion is fundamental to Objectivism and Rand's subsequent decisions. Three years after moving to Crimea, Alissa returned to Saint Petersburg, now Petrograd, to enroll at Petrograd State University and formally engage with political theory.

The Bolsheviks had instituted policies that allowed students, including women and Jews who were previously kept out of the higher education system, to enroll in universities free of cost. Within these institutions, hostility against counterrevolutionaries, scarce school supplies, failing

infrastructure, and ongoing reorganization were defining elements.<sup>xvii</sup> Alissa studied social pedagogy, specializing in history and philosophy studies. She also enrolled in courses on psychology and French, Russian, and German literature. She became particularly captivated by ancient Greek philosophy. The ancients, Rand wrote, “liberated humanity from mysticism and religion that rules previous societies,” so man, “for the first time, [...] was free to face an unobstructed universe, free to declare that his *mind* was competent to deal with all of the problems of his existence and that *reason* was his only means of knowledge.”<sup>xviii</sup> Rand scarcely acknowledged, let alone venerated other intellectuals, but her respect for Aristotle is evident in all of her work.

Rand believed Aristotle reconciled reason, logic, and the scientific method to establish a set of rules that informed humans of right and wrong.<sup>xix</sup> She called Aristotelianism “the intellect’s Declaration of Independence and titles her *magnum opus* in his memory; “If there is a philosophical Atlas who carries the whole of Western civilization on his shoulders, it is Aristotle...whatever intellectual progress men have achieved rests on his achievements.”<sup>xx,xxi</sup> Although she disagreed with Platonism, Rand looks to Plato’s dialectic forms to create fiction and nonfiction dialogues in Objectivism. The philosophy is exclusively explicated as a negation between her ideals of reason and debunking the opposition. Rand wrote several commentaries on Aristotle in *The Objectivist* and *The Objectivist Newsletter* in which she critiques his ideas.<sup>xxii</sup>

Despite her interest in the material with which she was engaging at Petrograd State University, Alissa disliked academia. Censorship in the form of Anticommunist purges and Communist influenced rhetoric made Rosenbaum skeptical of the quality of her education and more resentful toward Communism.<sup>xxiii</sup> Outside of the classroom, Ayn sought to study atheist philosophers and writers. She focused on Nietzschean philosophy, challenging the foundations of

Christianity and traditional morality, and emphasizing the individual, cultural health, and “life-affirmation.” She enjoyed the romanticism of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Victor Hugo, Edmond Rostand, and Friedrich Schiller and included these authors in her later literature. Rand learned that these student authors were greatly influenced by operettas. She became intrigued by film and cinema. After graduating from Petrograd State University, Rand pursued these interests as a at State Technicum for Screen Arts in the same city, which had at this point been renamed Leningrad.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Russian cinema was an obsolete industry—one of few, Rosenbaum felt had yet to be fully tainted by communist influence.<sup>xxv</sup> Alissa’s obsession with politics quickly dissipated and was replaced with a love for film—particularly American movies. She wrote of Hollywood, “people, for whom 24 hours is not enough time in a day, stream in a constant wave over its boulevards, smooth as marble. It is difficult for them to talk with one another, because the noise of automobiles drowns out their voices. Shining, elegant Fords and Rolls-Royces fly, flickering, as the frames of one continuous movie reel. And the sun strikes the blazing windows of enormous, snow white studios. Every night, and electric glow rises over the city.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Rand’s exposure to film inspired her admiration of America and its freedoms. The Bolsheviks were quick to realize the power of the art form and utilized film students to create communist propoganda. Disgusted by this, Alissa was determined to immigrate to the United States to become a screenwriter.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Anna and Zinovy Rosenbaum sold their remaining riches to buy their daughter a ticket to visit, her cousins, Minna Goldberg, Anna Stone, and Sarah Lipton, in Chicago. In January 1926, Alissa left for “the greatest country on earth” with no intention of returning.<sup>xxviii</sup> She arrived in the with high hopes and a new name: Ayn.<sup>xxix</sup>

## Ayn Rand in America

Ayn Rand is said to have cried when she first saw the New York skyline. She would later describe the city as “the will of man, made visible,” and skyscrapers as “the finger of God and the greatest symbol of free man.”<sup>xxx</sup> Sarah Lipton was the perfect host—an English-speaking, movie theater owner. In Chicago, Rand watched hundreds of movies and wrote to improve her English. One night while she was working on a play, Ayn called her cousin Fern Brown over and said, “I’m going to be called Ayn [...] but I need a last name [...] I want it to begin with an R, because that is my real initial.’ [...] she looked at the typewriter—it was a Remington Rand—and she said, ‘Ayn Remington...No that’s wrong...I know! —Ayn Rand.’<sup>xxxi,2</sup> Presumably, shedding “Rosenbaum” liberated Rand from her traumatic experiences as a Jew in the Soviet Union and prepared her for a new life as a writer in America.

With her new freedom, Rand left for Los Angeles to pursue her career. In Hollywood, she struggled to succeed and took up odd jobs as a film extra, junior screenwriter, and head of costume. In 1927, she met her husband, actor Frank O’Connor, on the set of *The King of Kings* where he had a small part and she was an extra. Ironically, the film is about Jesus Christ and the religious and political oppression he encounters in his final days.<sup>xxxii</sup> Rand and O’Connor married in 1929 and Rand became an American citizen soon after.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The two would have a long and unconventional marriage.

In 1950, Nathaniel Blumenthal, a 19-year-old student contacted Rand to express his admiration for her work. Nathaniel became Rand’s first student and an integral element of the early Objectivist movement. He would go on to change his last name to Branden to incorporate “Rand”

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<sup>2</sup> The validity of the story is contested by the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI Web FAQ 2017). It is likely that this is an attempt by ARI to undermine the Brandens’ involvement in the Objectivist movement after the “Branden-break.”

in his identity. The two would have a romantic relationship of which both of their spouses were aware. The end of their relationship, spurred by another affair Branden was involved in, would cause a split in the Objectivist orthodoxy.

## **Ayn Rand's Fiction**

While working on movie sets in California, Rand wrote her first full-length screenplay *Red Pawn* (1932), a spy thriller set in 1920s Soviet Russia and addressing the evils of dictatorship. In 1934, she would begin her foray into philosophy with *Ideal*, a novel published in 2015 which portrays an “ideal” female protagonist. Rand’s true battle against communist ideals came to light in 1936 when she published *We the Living*, a story of post-Revolutionary life in Russia that addresses the struggle between the state and individual. In the 1959 edition of the novel, Rand wrote in the foreword “[this is] as near to an autobiography as I will ever write. It is not an autobiography in the literal, but only the intellectual sense. The plot is invented; the background is not...”<sup>xxxiv</sup> Her final short novel continued the fight against communism. *Anthem* (1938) portrays a dystopian future in which the word “I” has been forgotten and replaced with “we” as a consequence of totalitarian collectivism.

Ayn Rand’s major fame came with the publication of *The Fountainhead* in 1943. The epic novel tells the story of a young architect, Howard Roark, who refuses to compromise his artistic and moral vision for worldly praise and wealth. The story is a presentation of Rand’s “ideal man” and a case for individualism over collectivism. At first, the novel was rejected by twelve publishers, but the Bobbs-Merrill Company eventually took the book to press—50 years later, 7.9 million copies have been sold.<sup>xxxv</sup>

*The Fountainhead* attracted masses of beatnik era young people who were interested in Rand’s commitment to the individual’s ability to take control of their own lives and in turn change

society. In response to the mass acclaim, Rand moved from Los Angeles to New York City where she felt she always belonged.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In 1951, Rand and her closest followers formed “the Class of ’43,” known internally as “The Collective.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> The organization consisted of individuals interested in applying Ayn Rand’s ideas to their daily lives. Members included Alan Greenspan,<sup>3</sup> Leonard Peikoff,<sup>4</sup> Joan Mitchell,<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel Branden,<sup>6</sup> and Barbara Branden.<sup>7, xxxviii</sup> Several members of ‘The Collective’ would go on to become instrumental members of late 20<sup>th</sup> century objectivist institutions and American politics.

Rand’s novels were popular in the Anticommunist, free-market, and conservative political communities. In 1940, she was invited to speak at a support rally for Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie.<sup>xxxix</sup> Her involvement in the campaign connected her with intellectuals sympathetic to free-market capitalism. One of these people was Henry Hazlitt, an American journalist who wrote on conservative and libertarian economics. Hazlitt introduced Rand to the New York conglomerate of Austrian School Economics—a 20<sup>th</sup> century economic theory based on the concept of methodological individualism,<sup>8</sup> pioneered by Ludwig von Mises.<sup>xi</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Greenspan served as the Chairman of the Federal Reserve of the United States from 1987 to 2006 (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System).

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Peikoff is the legal heir to Ayn Rand’s estate and founder of the Ayn Rand Institute in Irvine, California. (Burns 2009)

<sup>5</sup> Alan Greenspan’s wife and an artist. (Branden 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Nee. Nathaniel Blumenthal, Nathaniel Branden was a psychotherapist and the first student of Ayn Rand. The two had a romantic relationship while Rand was married to Frank O’Conner and Nathaniel was married to Barbara Branden. All parties were aware of the affair. Nathaniel would also go on to establish the Nathaniel Branden Institute before Rand expelled the Brandens from her circle due to Nathaniel’s engagement in another affair of which Barbara was aware (Heller 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Branden was married to Nathaniel Branden and was a close friend to Ayn Rand. She would go on to write *The Passion of Ayn Rand* (1986); an account of Rand’s life and legacy (Branden 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Methodological individualism is the theory that social phenomena that results from the motivations and actions of individuals.

Rand continued to develop her economic theory, influenced by Austrian economic thought, especially emphasizing value transaction and examining the social ramifications of economic transaction. However, she would distance herself from the school due to a departure in philosophical values. Rand agreed with the economic theory of the Austrian School and the American Heterodox that eventually came about, but found that these ideologies lacked philosophical foundations. She considered Mises an immoral utilitarian and Hayek<sup>9</sup> an ardent welfare statist.<sup>xli</sup> Rand said of the Austrian School of Economics “they are a school that has a great deal of truth and proper arguments to offer about capitalism...but I certainly don’t agree with them in every detail, and particularly not in their alleged philosophical premises. They don’t have any, actually. They attempt—von Mises particularly—to substitute economics for philosophy. That cannot be done.”<sup>xlii</sup> Despite Rand’s distaste for the Austrian school, Mises remained a fan and would describe Rand as “the most courageous man in America” after her publication of *The Fountainhead*.

In addition to her involvement with free-market communities, Rand became actively involved in anticommunist political groups. She was a member of the Hollywood anticommunist group, the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals,<sup>10</sup> and the Anticommunist American Writers Association. In 1945, Rand testified before the US House Un-American Activities Committee as a “friendly witness,” to describe the disparity between her life in Soviet Russia and the portrayal of the Soviet State in the 1944 film *Song of Russia*.<sup>xliii</sup> She argued the portrayal was far too positive. Eventually, she would co-found Associated Ex-Willkie

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<sup>9</sup> Hayek would revive the heterodox Austrian School of Economics in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hayek Center).

<sup>10</sup> Ayn Rand authored the pamphlet for the alliance, which encouraged Americans not to support films with communist sentiment and cited movies such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* and *A Song to Remember* as anti-American due to their collectivist messages (*Journals of Ayn Rand*, 10).

Workers Against Willkie and write about how the candidate failed to provide a moral justification for capitalism.<sup>xliv</sup> This was a pivotal moment for Rand; it signaled her distancing from American political activism to begin developing her philosophy.

While involved in American political and economic movements in the 1950s, Rand worked on her *magnum opus*, *Atlas Shrugged*. Since its publication in 1957, 7 million copies of the novel have been sold.<sup>xlv</sup> *Atlas Shrugged* is touted as the “bible of Objectivism.” Rand describes the theme of the novel as “the role of the mind in man’s existence—and, as a corollary, the demonstration of a new moral philosophy: the morality of rational self-interest.”

*Atlas Shrugged* takes place in a dystopian United States where creative industrialists, scientists, and artists hideaway on strike against a welfare state. The main protagonist, John Galt, Rand’s ideal man, “stops the motor of the world” by withdrawing the minds of the individuals most contributing to the nation’s wealth and achievement. Rand illustrates that without the most talented value creators, society would collapse. The novel was generally disliked by literary critics, but gathered Objectivism further attention as an influence in American thought. Many libertarians and conservatives who adhere to what, by Rand’s standard, are impure forms of capitalism, still use this novel to encourage their free market positions.

### **Ayn Rand the Philosopher**

After *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand spent the remainder of her life developing and promoting Objectivism. Upon her death in 1982, Leonard Peikoff became the heir to Rand’s work and founded the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI). ARI is a nonprofit think tank in Irvine, California with the stated goal to “foster a growing awareness, understanding and acceptance of Ayn Rand’s philosophy, Objectivism, in order to create a culture whose guiding principles are reason, rational self-interest, individualism and laissez-faire capitalism — a culture in which individuals are free

to pursue their own happiness.”<sup>xlvi,xlvii</sup> The Institute survives with support from objectivist organizations and individuals. Other unaffiliated organizations exist with the function of studying and disseminating Objectivist ideas.

## Ayn Rand's Objectivism

*[Objectivism], in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute.*

— Ayn Rand, *appendix to Atlas Shrugged*

In the era marking the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, Ayn Rand created a philosophy that was a stark departure from European collectivism and the American New Left. A critic of Rand's philosophy who writes on Objectivism as a libertarian philosophy influenced by Vladimir Nabokov calls Objectivism a response to "communism, socialism, religion, the New Deal, the welfare state, and to imagine a renewed future for unfettered capitalism in America."<sup>xlvi</sup> Rand would have disagreed with this claim—she was adamant about the immutability of her philosophy.

Objectivism, Ayn Rand would assert, is not a response to her life in Russia or the period into which she was born. Instead, it is "a philosophy for living on earth" that holds truth in any social climate.<sup>xlix</sup> It is impossible that Rand completely separated her lived experience from her life's work. Instead these statements appear as an attempt to validate Objectivism by aligning the ideology as based in reason as opposed to emotion. Rand looked at emotion as something that "tells you nothing about reality beyond the fact that something makes you feel something."<sup>l</sup> She demanded that "man [choose] his values by a conscious process of thought."<sup>li</sup> Her decision to neglect her personal life as an influence in her philosophy is evidence of her desire to split from a past disenfranchised life and create one in which she is powerful and righteous.

Ayn Rand believed that philosophy is the most fundamental study. In various lectures, she would state the importance of philosophy by posing three questions, "Where am I? How can I discover it? What should I do?" She would explain that most humans evade these questions and

consequently struggle to lead “meaningful lives.”<sup>lii</sup> Further, she would tell listeners that by resolving these fundamental questions of philosophy they could live a fulfilling life. Rand develops Objectivism to provide a universal solution to these fundamental questions. In the first publication of *The Objectivist Newsletter*, Rand introduces her philosophy “in full:”

1. Metaphysics: Objective Reality [Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man’s feelings, wishes, hopes or fears.]
2. Epistemology: Reason [Reason (the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses) is man’s only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival.]
3. Ethics: Self-Interest [ Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of this own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.]
4. Politics: Capitalism [The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit. It is a system where no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and no man may initiate the use of physical force against others. The government acts only as a policeman that protects man’s rights; it uses physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use, such as criminals or foreign invaders. In a system of full capitalism, there should be (but, historically, has not yet been) a complete separation of state and economics, in the same way and for the same reasons as the separation of state and church.]<sup>liii</sup>

Objectivism was Rand’s effort to use reason to protect America, “the freest nation” from economic regulation and limited individual liberties. Prevalent anti-trust legislation and racist government policies frustrated Rand.<sup>liv</sup> She sought to encourage a climate of reason-based social organization. She wrote, “I am not *primarily* an advocate of capitalism, but of egoism; and I am not *primarily* an advocate of egoism, but of reason. If one recognizes the supremacy of reason and applies it consistently, all the rest follows.”<sup>lv</sup> Rand published various articles and books, and spoke in public to disseminate her accessible approach to daily living and address central philosophical quandaries. Barbara Branden, one of Rand’s first students and closest friends, describes Rand as

having “a way of raising precisely the concepts that were most relevant to me, and of demonstrating the crucial role of philosophy in the living on one’s life.”<sup>lvi</sup>

### **Metaphysics: Objectivity**

A metaphysical basis for the philosophy that incorporates reason to establish a fundamental reality in which Rand’s philosophy can work and is used to legitimize the functions of limited government and self-interest. Rand calls this metaphysics “objectivity” and defines it as “the recognition of the fact that reality exists independent of any perceiver’s consciousness.”<sup>lvii</sup> This establishes the possibility of immutable truth.

Within this objective reality, “created by nature, man does not *decide*, in issues of knowledge, he merely observes that which is [...] this means that man does not *create* reality and can achieve his values only by making his decisions consonant with the facts of reality.”<sup>lviii</sup> This concept posits that reality is a function of science, as opposed to a product of divinity.

This idea is also utilized by current Objectivist scholars affiliated with the Ayn Rand Institute to defend Objectivism as a closed system.<sup>lix</sup> Leonard Peikoff, Rand’s intellectual heir, adheres to the idea that new applications and implications of Objectivism might be discovered, but the philosophy itself is restricted to the ideas Ayn Rand had and recorded. He asserts that no new ideas can be added to the system because Objectivism and Ayn Rand are practically one in the same.<sup>lx</sup> Disagreement about the open or closed nature of Objectivism created a split in the movement in the 1980s.<sup>lxi</sup>

Rand alienates all humans with these definitions of reality and moral decision making. These vague and obscure ideas entrance readers by offering easy to understand axioms: “reality is real” and “reason is infallible.” Objectivism neglects to acknowledge that the only way to observe reality is through conscious perception which utilizes emotion and instinct. The idea that a person

can define a reality apart from their perception and consciousness is unrealistic. Therefore, Rand is asserting that the reality that she has identified as a consequence of her experiences is the “objective reality.”

The metaphysics of Objectivism a significant reason for Rand’s popularity in conservative circles. A former policy advisor to Mitt Romney, Rick Perry, and Marco Rubio wrote:

Objectivism is a philosophy for winners, leaders, producers, creators, alpha males and females and those on their way. It is a philosophy for people with self-respect, self-loyalty, self-confidence, self-esteem, and independence. It is for those with a rugged individualist spirit. That is why Ayn Rand has an enormous reservoir of goodwill among the American people. America is a culture of winners. This is an exceptional nation, and Americans are still an exceptional people.<sup>lxii</sup>

Not all individuals are able to succeed in America by using their “rugged individualist spirit.” Most people do not contribute to the “enormous reservoir of goodwill” toward Ayn Rand. Objectivism is based on creating a society that celebrates the “hardworking businessman.” It is no wonder that Rand’s ideas are most popular among people of privilege and power because these people create “the facts of objective reality” and are hence best equipped to “make decisions consonant with the facts of reality.” Rand is largely celebrated by white wealthy men, mostly politicians, who are part of what Rand calls “the persecuted minority.” These people are likely to have been exposed to Rand as high school or college students and can identify with her rhetoric of “hard work” and “self-interest” because they benefit from the capitalism that Rand defends. Rand is mostly prominent in working class movements that consist of people who are less likely to have read her work, but support politicians who espouse her ideas.

Individuals across racial, cultural, and economic lines read Ayn Rand’s literature, but more often than not, those who stay committed to her thoughts are Right-Wing sympathizers. Marginalized people are less able to identify with Objectivist ideas because they are unable to relate to and are often hurt by the “objective reality” fundamental to Rand’s philosophy.

## Epistemology: Reason

To comprehend objective reality and inform human action, Rand requires individuals must employ reason. “Reason integrates man’s perceptions by means of forming abstractions or conceptions, thus raising man’s knowledge from the *perceptual* level, which he shares with animals, to the *conceptual* level, which he alone can reach. The *method* which reason employs in this process is *logic*—and logic is the art of *non-contradictory identification*.”<sup>lxiii</sup> Reason, as defined, is a scientific basis for intellectual exploration, knowledge development, and prescribed action.

## Ethics: Rational Self- Interest

Ayn Rand has been notorious for espousing a philosophy that is allegedly rooted in “selfishness.” Self-interest is a central point of Objectivism that is used to legitimize action compliant with a *homo economicus*<sup>11</sup> to achieve the most productive and just capitalist society.

The Objectivist ethics proudly advocates and *upholds rational selfishness*—which means: the values required for man’s survival *qua* man—which means: the values required for *human* survival—not the values produced by the desires, the emotions, the “aspirations,” the feelings, the whims or the needs of irrational brutes, who have never outgrown the primordial practice of human sacrifices, have never discovered an industrial society and can conceive of no self-interest but that of grabbing the loot of the moment.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Self-interest is fundamental to moral decision making and necessary for free-market capitalism in the Objectivist framework.

In addition to advocating for self-interest, Rand denounces altruism. “The basic principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue and value.”<sup>lxv</sup>

Altruism, Rand asserts, is not “kindness, good will or respect for the rights of others. These are not primaries, but consequences, which, in fact, altruism makes impossible. The irreducible primary

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<sup>11</sup> *Homo economicus* is a term used in economic theory to describe a figurative human being characterized by the infinite ability to make rational decisions (Investopedia).

of altruism, the basic absolute, is *self-sacrifice*—which means; self-immolation, self-abnegation, self-denial, self-destruction—which means: the *self* as a standard of evil, the *selfless* as a standard of the good.”<sup>lxvi</sup> Altruism is presented as an indication of moral weakness and exploitation of human innovation. Rand’s emphasis on self-interest is perhaps a jab at traditional religious rhetoric, specifically Christian teachings, that champion the virtue of altruism.

## **Politics: Capitalism**

Objectivism advocates for laissez-faire capitalism. Rand considered herself a radical for capitalism.<sup>lxvii</sup> She believes capitalism most accurately represents the basic existential qualities of man. She wrote of the economic system:

It is the basic, metaphysical fact of man’s nature—the connection between his survival and his use of reason—that capitalism recognizes and protects. In a capitalist society, all human relationships are voluntary. Men are free to cooperate or not, to deal with one another or not, as their own individual judgments, convictions and interests dictate. They can deal with one another only in terms of and by means of reason, i.e., by means of discussion, persuasion, and contractual agreement, by voluntary choice to mutual benefit. The right to a free with others is not a problem in any society; it is the right to disagree that is crucial. It is the institution of private property that protects and implements the right to disagree—and thus keeps the road open to man’s most valuable attribute (valuable personally, social, and objectively): the creative mind.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Rand calls this her moral defense for capitalism. She advocates for a market uninfluenced by the state and for limited government that serves solely to protect individual freedoms and the free market.

Consistent with other counterculture NRMs, Objectivism integrates anti-war sentiment among young people. She defends capitalism on the basis that it is “the only social system based on the recognition of individual rights and therefore, the only system that bans force from social relationships. By the nature of its basic principles and interests, it is the only system fundamentally opposed to war.”<sup>lxix</sup> She appeals to youth interest in social justice by addressing the association of

capitalism with poverty by telling her readers that “capitalism did not create poverty—it inherited it. Compared to the centuries of precapitalist starvation, the living conditions of the poor in the early years of capitalism were the first chance the poor ever had to survive. As proof—the enormous growth of the European population during the nineteenth century, a growth over 300 per cent, as compared to the previous growth of something like 3 per cent per century.”<sup>lxx</sup> The justification for Rand’s logic is scarce. Capitalism existed long before World War II and still there was and still is war. Additionally, poverty is uncontestably a product of capitalism. Low-wage workers, undocumented immigrants, and in some cases free laborers are exploited to benefit large corporations. Perhaps in Rand’s “objective reality” a non-exploitative capitalism might exist, but it is unlikely given the near impossibility of an “objective reality” in which truly forceless social relationships are ubiquitous.

Objectivism asserts that the right to property, an essential element of *laissez-faire* capitalism, is the functional implementation of the right to life. Rand writes that “the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product, is a slave.”<sup>lxxi</sup>

Based on this understanding of production, government is to defend against coercion or applied force. Rand explains, “a proper government is only a policeman acting as an agent of man’s self-defense, and, as such, may resort to force *only* against those who *start* the use of force. The only proper functions of a government are: the police, to protect you from criminals; the army, to protect you from foreign invaders; and the courts, to protect your property and contracts from breach and fraud by others, to settle disputes by rational rules, according to *objective* law.”<sup>lxxii</sup> A government greater than these basic functions, Rand believed, would be a force against free will and individualism.

Free will is defined in Objectivism as the “mind’s freedom to think or not [...] the choice that controls all the choices you make and determines your life and character.”<sup>lxxiii</sup> The government, as Rand saw it, would not protect individual freedoms, instead individuals needed “freedom from the coercive power of the state.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> This establishes a unique basis for individual rights. An individual right, Rand says is “a moral principle defining and sanctioning a man’s freedom of action in a social consequence” she asserts “there is only one fundamental right (all the others are its consequences or corollaries): a man’s right to his own life.”<sup>lxxv</sup>

# Objectivism as a New Religious Movement

## **The Counterculture and New Religious Movements in America**

The 1950s was a defining decade in American history characterized by conservatism and consumerism. The nation was experiencing the post-WWII economic boom; a welcomed departure from the turmoil of the first half of the century marked by World War I, World War II, and the Great Depression that separated them. The national GDP nearly tripled during the decade, allowing Americans to experience a higher than ever level of purchasing power.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Unemployment and inflation levels hit a historic low, and household incomes hit an all-time high.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Americans enjoyed the benefits of government spending to improve national infrastructure, public education, veteran's benefits, and technological innovation. Veterans returning from war received low-rate mortgages as part of their GI benefits and began moving out of urban spaces to start new lives in suburbia.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Levittowns were the latest symbol of middle-class American living —identical mass produced homes with white picket fences, green lawns, and garages complete with a family car. The “all-American family” portrayed by the likes of the Cleaver family<sup>12</sup> on newly affordable mass-produced televisions, was the new standard. The ubiquity of televisions, financial stability, and a budding advertising industry contributed to the consumption of appliances and automobiles that gave people more leisure time, and in turn, more time to consume comfort commodities. Women who were instrumental to the labor force during World War II left their jobs when their male counterparts returned. They were encouraged and expected to embrace their new roles as

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<sup>12</sup> The Cleaver family was the fictional family featured in the sitcom *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963).

mothers and wives. Birth rates doubled over the decade and delivered the “baby boomer” generation—the population grew 19 percent.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Despite the economic success in the 1950s, the decade was wrought with conflict. Jaded young men returning from war, women who were culturally restricted to homemaking, and people of color who disproportionately suffered as a consequence of white flight, questioned social norms and resisted “the establishment.” The era saw the beginning of the second strain of American feminism that emphasized reproductive rights and employment. The movement took the nation with full force after the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The Civil Rights Movement was born when Americans began to mobilize against racial injustices with acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience. Beat literature, written primarily by young white men of elite academic institutions, challenged conservatism and inspired generations of anti-establishment youth. Novels and poetry advocated anti-materialism, sexual liberation, feminism, religious mockery, and drug use. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Clellon Holmes, and their fellow beatniks laid the groundwork for the counterculture youth of the 1960s and the hippies of the 1970s.

Fear of communism in the United States after the Second World War sparked the second Red Scare, better remembered as McCarthyism. Religious rhetoric, commonly relating to Judeo-Christian traditions, was used as a political tool to thwart communism in America. World War II hero President Dwight D. Eisenhower promoted religion as the American way. He was baptized before taking office and began his inauguration with a prayer. In 1955, Eisenhower stated “recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic expression of Americanism.”<sup>lxxx</sup> Religion was advertised as “a source against the H-bomb” and “America’s secret weapon.”<sup>lxxxi</sup> The president encouraged the inclusion of “under God” in the pledge of allegiance and formally

institutionalized religiosity in the United States by signing legislation that requires the addition of “In God We Trust” to currency. Nationwide church membership grew from 57 percent of the population in 1950 to 63 percent of the population in 1960.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The government reacted to the Red Scare enacting programs such as the Civil Service Commission Loyalty Review Board, the FBI “Responsibilities Program,” the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, and the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). HUAC achieved its greatest notoriety with its investigation into communism in the film industry.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Industry professionals were subpoenaed to testify about known or suspected members of the Communist Party. Simultaneously, conservative Hollywood professionals created the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. Composed of the likes of Ronald Regan, Walt Disney, Ginger Rogers, John Wayne, and Ayn Rand, the Alliance provided the largest number of friendly witnesses to HUAC during the film industry investigation.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Ayn Rand was an integral member of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. In 1947, she wrote the “Screen Guide for Americans,” a pamphlet warning against collectivist representations in Hollywood and advocating for free speech.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Her association with the organization was one of her final political involvements after having been heavily involved in the Wendell Willkie Campaign, Associated Ex-Willkie Workers Against Willkie, and the Austrian and Frankfurt Schools of Economics.

Frustrated with what she regarded as degenerating American values and rebellious youth, Rand concluded that there would never be an intellectual or cultural space representative of her ideals. Despite her interest in film and literature, Rand committed the remainder of her life to developing Objectivism. In 1958, she began to teach—first as an instructor for a fiction writing

course, and two years later, as a guest lecturer delivering “Faith and Force: Destroyers of the Modern World.” In the 1960s, Rand would complete the majority of her nonfiction works.

The 1960s came as a decade of violent and pained resistance following a period of conformity, conservatism, and consumerism. The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a profound effect on the youth of the time. Many blamed the generations that came before them for the maladies of their era. Out of anxieties concerning racism, sexism, and classism came the counterculture of “the Sixties.”

Youth across the country were “tuning in and dropping out” of the mainstream to explore the value of the individual and spiritual growth. The children of the “all-American family” experimented with psychedelic drugs, communal living, and sex. Some counterculture youth organized against the establishment through politics. The New Left, a group with Marxist, Maoist, anarchist, and Trotskyist influence, introduced more radical action to promote civil rights, LGBTQ rights, reproductive rights, gender equality, drugs, and labor reform. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the organizational focus of the New Left, led national opposition against the War in Vietnam and left behind a legacy of participatory democracy, radicalism, and organizational frameworks for subsequent student resistance groups.

### **Ayn Rand and the New Left**

Ayn Rand was particularly critical of the New Left. In 1971, she published *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* (1971); a collection of essays analyzing campus protests and New Left ideology. She considered the movement as an attack against freedom; a “spectacle of old Marxist blessing, aiding and abetting the young hoodlums [of the New Left] (who are their products and heirs) who proclaim the superiority of feelings over reason, of faith over knowledge,

of leisure over production, of spiritual concerns over material comforts, of primitive nature over technology, of astrology over science, of drugs over consciousness.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

1950s America, in many ways, was Rand’s ideal state of the nation. Consumerism, capitalism, and national pride are consistent with Objectivist rhetoric of “America as the greatest and noblest and, in its original founding principles the *only* moral country in the history of the world.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> It is no surprise that the New Left’s opposition to this culture fundamentally irritated Rand. Ironically, *Atlas Shrugged* was almost entirely an ode to the counterculture intellectual millennial.

Of course, Rand did not support collectivism, mysticism, and drug use. However, she advocated dropping out of the society one is born into in order to create a society representative of one’s values. John Galt, the protagonist of *Atlas Shrugged*, is the son of a mechanic. He is a talented young student who leaves home at age twelve and enrolls in college at age sixteen. He studies physics and philosophy and takes a job as an engineer.

While working at a motor company, Galt designs a revolutionary motor powered by static electricity. However, he abandons the project when the new owners of the company decide to run the factory on the collectivist principle of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” After leaving the motor company, Galt encourages a group of the world’s greatest intellectuals to cease contributing to society and dismantle bureaucracy. They establish a settlement off the grid in a Colorado mountain valley to plan a revolutionary strike.

Galt is introduced to the reader, and reintroduced to society in the novel, by Dagny Taggart. Taggart is a *businesswoman* who defies gender norms and creates a successful railroad line that outperforms competitors because its tracks are built using an innovative steel created by a producer shunned by his industry. The novel is an appeal to all that millennial minds crave. It is a love story

that redefines gender roles, a guide for virtuous living, and gives hope that committing to a moral life might lead to the government collapse and reform.

Cultural resistance in literature, art, and politics was supplemented with new interest in alternative religions. Many counterculture youth associated Judeo-Christian traditions with “the establishment” and their esteemed enemy, Eisenhower. Youth found limited comfort in the solutions traditional religious groups offered to the social injustices and cultural revolutions they were witnessing in their world. Young adult membership in mainline religious groups declined in the 1960s.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Individuals were increasingly interested in independent spiritual journeys and finding religious practices that assuaged their anxieties about social organization, injustice, and technology. There was a universal willingness to borrow practices and beliefs from diverse religious and cultural traditions and a hope in endless spiritual possibilities.

New religious movements addressing these concerns erupted in the 60s. NRM is a category used to describe new, alternative, or nonmainstream religions.<sup>13</sup> Many NRMs specifically established and popularized by the counterculture had “[great] tension with the mainstream, were the most radical and innovative, and often were led by authoritarian leaders who attracted adherents from alienated or marginal classes.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> Some groups were derivatives of Judeo-Christian traditions, others notably included Asian religious traditions, and some developed without traditional faith bases. Prominent movements in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century include the Peoples Temple, Branch Davidians, Heaven’s Gate, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Scientology, the Unification Church, and various iterations of Japanese and

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<sup>13</sup> In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term cult was accepted by scholars as a term to describe NRMs. However, the anti-cult movement and subsequent pejorative connotations has put the term out of scholarly use (Lewis 2004).

Tibetan Buddhism. These movements addressed sexuality, civil rights, gender roles, capitalism, and technological and scientific innovation (an element significant due to nuclear warfare and weaponry development in the Cold War).<sup>xc</sup> Most of these new traditions also shed materialism, encouraged communal living, provided individualized spiritual exploration, had physical elements of practice, and were inspired or led by non-traditional leaders (women, non-white men, etc.).<sup>xcii</sup>

### **Ayn Rand's New Religious Movement**

Ayn Rand's Objectivism is much different than popular NRMs of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is relentlessly atheist, denounces collectivism in all forms, and criticizes the cultural components of the counterculture. However, Objectivism fundamentally fits the socio-psycho-cultural framework of a NRM. A charismatic leader provides a departure from the traditions of the time and offers a value system to dictate daily living, social organization, and a "salvation."<sup>xciii</sup> In a period where capitalism was villainized by the youth who arguably most benefitted from its products, Rand provided a unique moral defense for self-interest, conservatism, and the free market. She attracted people from the same echelon as those joining other NRMs commonly affiliated with the counterculture. The majority of Objectivists in the 1960s were college students who had read *The Fountainhead* or *Atlas Shrugged* and responded to the "Message from the Author" at the end of each novel.<sup>xciii</sup>

Ayn Rand would have vehemently opposed the classification of Objectivism as a NRM. In response to the new wave of religious movements she wrote "philosophy is the goal toward which religion was only a helplessly blind groping. The grandeur, the reverence, the exalted purity, the austere dedication to the pursuit of truth, which are commonly associated with religion, should properly belong to the field of philosophy."<sup>xciv</sup> Here, and in other writings, Rand neglects key elements of new religious movements. Notably, the significance of charismatic leadership,

response to moral anxieties in the zeitgeist, a solution to sociocultural tensions, and a unique organization and dynamic of a religious group of followers.<sup>xcv</sup> Objectivism can be classified as a new religious movement because it sufficiently meets these criteria.

Unlike charismatic social movements that evolved from specific political and social issues (SDS, Black Panthers, etc.), Objectivism was developed by Rand primarily as a guide to “everyday living.” She warned her followers “not [to] join the wrong ideological groups (groups or movements proclaiming some vaguely generalized, undefined, and usually contradictory political goals) or movements, in order to ‘do something.’” She identified “the Conservative Party, that subordinates reason to faith, and substitutes theocracy for capitalism; or the “libertarian” hippies, who subordinate reason to whims, and substitute anarchism for capitalism” as dangerous organizations bound to fail.<sup>xcvi</sup> Rand’s concern with philosophical integrity and unfaltering commitment to the movement is consistent with behaviors of a charismatic leader.<sup>xcvii</sup>

Objectivism, like most NRMs, emerged at a point of tension and crisis in American history.<sup>xcviii</sup> The fear of communism lingered in the United States through the Cold War Era. Rand’s philosophy, created in opposition to Bolshevism, aggressively battled collectivism. Objectivism was more appealing to counterculture youth than the conservative anticommunist, pro-capitalist rhetoric of the 1950s because it departs from a religious revival and emphasis on Judeo-Christian values.

Rand provides an antiwar defense to laissez-faire capitalism calling it “the only social system based on the recognition of individual rights and, therefore, the only system that bans force from social relationship. By the nature of its principles and interests, it is the only system fundamentally opposed to war.”<sup>xcix</sup> She also provides a claim for the socially just nature of capitalism asserting that “the *moral* justification of capitalism does not lie in the altruist claim that

it represents the best way to achieve “the common good.” It is true that capitalism does—if that catchphrase has any meaning—but this is merely a secondary consequence. The moral justification of capitalism lies in the fact that it is the only system consonant with man’s rational nature, that it protects man’s survival *qua* man, and that its ruling principle is: *justice*.<sup>7c</sup> Assigning morality, social justice, and antiwar sentiment to capitalism was a heartening change in rhetoric for the youth of Eisenhower’s America.

Additionally, Objectivism was appealing to millennials because it rejects social stratification based on race or gender. Rand touted the ability for any person to be virtuous and experience “salvation.” Everyone, she wrote, “has a single basic choice: to think or not, and *that is* the gauge of his virtue. Moral perfection in an *unbreached rationality*—not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind, not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute.”<sup>ci</sup> This plan to reach “moral perfection” is an accessible standard Rand sets for her followers. It is common for charismatic religious leaders to offer an attainable method for living that provides gratification and salvation.<sup>cii</sup>

Rand rejects salvation in the mystical sense, but proposes a close alternative:

The maintenance of life and the pursuit of happiness are not two separate issues. To hold one’s own life as one’s ultimate value, and one’s own happiness as one’s highest purpose are two aspects of the same achievement. Existentially, the activity of pursuing rational goals is the activity of maintaining one’s life; psychologically, its result, reward and concomitant is an emotional state of happiness. It is by experiencing happiness that one lives one’s life, in any hour, year or the whole of it. And when one experiences the kind of pure happiness that is an end in itself—the kind that makes one think: “This is worth living for”—what one is greeting and affirming in emotional terms is the metaphysical fact that life is an end in itself.<sup>ciii</sup>

Objectivism rejects the idea that living a moral life on earth, by utilizing the products of free will, is a means of saving the soul from sin and its consequences, and delivering it to a higher state. Rand replaces traditional Judeo-Christian concepts of altruistic living and salvation with

“sustaining life by pursuing rational goals.”<sup>civ</sup> Put differently, acting as *homo economicus* devout to the production and institutions of a capitalist society is both the standard for virtuous living and the “purpose” of human life.

The “old religions” failed to meet millennial expectations of logic, accessibility, and inclusion.<sup>cv</sup> Objectivism was an inclusive option that satisfied a desire for a “rational” belief system. Rand identifies that religion, in the mystic sense, requires “the damnation of reason as a “limited,” deceptive, unreliable, impotent faculty, incapable of perceiving the “real” reality and “true” truth.”<sup>cvi</sup> She further denounces religious mysticism calling “the damnation of this earth as a realm where nothing is possible to man by pain, disaster and defeat, a realm inferior to another, “higher,” reality; the damnation of all values, enjoyment, achievement and success on earth as a proof of depravity.” Her zealous distaste for religion is an important factor to consider when evaluating Rand in American memory.

In its naissance, Objectivism was appealing in its ability to assign meaning to life without relying on spiritual mythology. However, Rand’s attack on religion also limited her ability to expand her following. She appealed to the “persecuted minority” she identified as the wealthy and big business, but her long-term luck with millennials was less impressive. The counterculture was a relatively small movement and despite Rand’s ability to satiate some of the generation’s apprehensions, the majority were unable to accept an ideology that idolizes capitalism and selfishness. Today, the atheism of Objectivist ideas is a primary reason for Rand’s relevance. Members of the Religious Right, Radical Right, Libertarians, Tea Partiers, and other religious capitalists are able to take ideas from Objectivism without the burden of a mainstream religious tradition.

## **Weber's Theory of Charismatic Authority and the Development of Ayn Rand's Movement**

Objectivism as a new religious movement, and its subsequent institutionalization in contemporary American politics, is best understood by applying Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority. Charisma and NRMs are not mutually exclusive, however charismatic leadership is a common characteristic of new religions.<sup>cvi</sup> This is likely because charismatic leaders are best able to empower others, assert authority, and inspire commitment. Charisma is an especially powerful tool for leaders to provide hope to a demoralized group, especially in a turbulent social climate. Additionally, it is a way for non-traditional religious authorities—women, men of low social status or education, and children—to command authority and respect.<sup>cvi</sup>

Weber distinguishes charismatic authority from “traditional” and “rational-legal authority.”<sup>cix</sup> He identifies charisma, legitimization, routinization, and charismatic succession as the key components of charismatic authority.

Charisma is defined as “a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.”<sup>cx</sup>

Legitimization of power occurs “on the basis of a leader's exceptional personal qualities or the demonstration of extraordinary insight and accomplishment, which inspire loyalty and obedience from followers.”<sup>cx</sup>

Routinization of charismatic authority is the process by which a charismatic leader “is succeeded by a bureaucracy controlled by a rationally established authority or by a combination of traditional and bureaucratic authority.”<sup>cxii</sup>

Routinization is critically influenced by charismatic succession, the transfer of power that occurs after a leader’s death or resignation. Weber’s observed methods of succession are: search revelation, designation by original leader, designation by qualified staff, hereditary charisma, and office charisma.<sup>cxiii</sup>

Studying the failure to routinize Objectivism following the designation of power from Rand to Nathaniel Branden, and later Rand to Leonard Peikoff, explains the decline of orthodox Objectivism.

### **Ayn Rand as a Charismatic Leader**

Ayn Rand’s Objectivism is an application of Aristotelean and classical liberal ideas to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America. *Capitalism: An Unknown Ideal* is a presentation of Adam Smith’s laissez-faire capitalism which Rand practically calls her own by consequence of applying what she claimed to be a novel “non-initiation of force” principle. The Objectivist claim that “non-initiation of force” is unique to the movement neglects the 250-year Enlightenment and classical liberal history of the non-aggression principle. This idea has been developed and applied to economic, social, and political theories by John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, and John Stuart Mills. Rand happened to be the first to create a label for the principle.

Rand is accused of plagiarizing the plot used in *Atlas Shrugged. The Driver* (1922) by Justin Raimondo tells the story of a persecuted entrepreneur who turns a failing railroad into a productive one that benefits the entire country. He is criticized by his countrymen and government for his material success. His name is Henry M. Galt—Rand’s protagonist was called John Galt.

Dagny Taggart, a main character in *Atlas Shrugged*, is criticized for rebuilding a failing railroad line using steel created by a marginalized inventor. Taggart and the inventor two quit their positions in society to join Galt in a strike against their nationalized government.<sup>cxiv</sup>

Even if Rand was a plagiarist, her ability to captivate and inspire was unmatched. Henry M. Galt has existed for almost a century, but it is John Galt whose name is used as rallying cry. Tormented teens graffiti “Who is John Galt?” on urban walls and clutch copies of *The Fountainhead*. A klatch of young adults would go so far as to maintain that this moral economic system was an original product of Ayn Rand’s mind. Clearly, Rand’s power was in her ability to capture young impressionable minds.

A variety of religious leaders with different personalities, religious traditions, and methodologies have been described as charismatic, but sociologists have identified common qualities between these leaders. Charismatic leaders tend to have energetic personalities and lead by example by committing completely to their message. They often maintain control by directly involving themselves in the daily life of their nascent group. What was perhaps Rand’s most charismatic quality, is the ability for a leader to interpret the problems of the human condition and present the solutions they espouse in compelling terms. Leaders might also create the impression that they are “extraordinary [...] by audaciously inserting themselves into the great historical and mythical scripts of their cultures.”<sup>cxv</sup>

### **“The Collective”**

The Collective was Rand’s Objectivist inner circle in the 1950s and 1960s. Originally it was called “the Class of ’43,” named after the year *The Fountainhead* was published. Members of the group committed to individualist ideas changed its name in jest. Initially, the Collective was not a formal organization. Barbara Branden called it “a group of people who met together because

of a common interest in ideas.”<sup>cxvi</sup> Rand wrote that “the spread of Objectivism through [...] culture [is] an intellectual movement—i.e., a trend among independent individuals who share the same ideas—but *not* as an organized movement.”<sup>cxvii</sup> Maintaining that the organization was not an established institution was integral for staying consistent with the Objectivist anti-collectivist principle.

The original disciples of Rand’s Collective were Nathaniel and Barbara Branden, Leonard Peikoff, Alan Greenspan, Joan Mitchell, Mary Ann Sures (née. Rukavina), Allan Blumenthal, Joan Kennedy Taylor, Elayne Kalberman and Harry Kalberman.<sup>cxviii</sup> The group of young students and professionals would meet every Saturday to learn from Rand at her New York home. For many members of the group, these weekly gatherings were their only form of intellectual or philosophical activity.<sup>cxix</sup>

Nathaniel Branden was Rand’s first student. He had read *The Fountainhead* at the age of 18 while studying psychology in Canada. He wrote to Rand revealing his admiration of her work and commitment to her philosophy. In 1950, several years after first corresponding with the young Nathaniel, Ayn Rand invited him and his then-girlfriend Barbara to her and Frank’s home in Los Angeles. The four would become great friends and the nucleus of the Collective.

When Rand first met, Nathaniel, his last name was Blumenthal. He adopted the name Branden to integrate “Rand” in his identity. The practice of renaming is common of followers of new religious movements. Often, taking on a new name symbolizes commitment to a new religious life or submission to a leader.<sup>cxx</sup>

In 1953, Barbara and Nathaniel were married. Soon after, Nathaniel and Ayn began an affair sanctioned by their spouses.<sup>cxxi</sup> It is typical of some charismatic religious leaders to use sex as a means of asserting power and assessing devotees’ commitment to the cause.<sup>cxxii</sup> Rand

convinced Nathaniel and Barbara that the affair was deeply intellectual; the sexual relationship was secondary.<sup>cxxiii</sup> Framing sex as an intellectual communion as opposed to a physical act is a way Rand made claims about her ability to transcend perception and exist in “objective reality.” Within this reality, all relationships and decisions are based in reason. Sex, under such premises, lacks emotional or instinctual drive and is therefore “moral.” Rand never gave this defense of her relationship with Nathaniel. In fact, she never admitted that the affair existed. Perhaps because Rand felt that her affair was contrary to Objectivist truths—her love for Branden was emotional, sexual, and intellectual. Ultimately, this relationship, a transgression of Rand’s philosophical values, was catastrophic for the Objectivist movement.

Rand eventually named Nathaniel her “intellectual heir,” tasking him with reforming society by spreading Objectivist ideas. In 1958, Branden founded the Nathaniel Branden Institute (NBI) with his teacher’s blessing and routinized Objectivist thought. Founding members of the Collective served as writers, sponsors, and lecturers for NBI. The Institute made the fictional depictions of Objectivism in Ayn Rand’s novels an attainable and legitimate reality for people to access and join.

In 1968, it was revealed that Nathaniel had been having a second affair. With this knowledge, Rand expelled Nathaniel from the Objectivist movement. She never admitted sexual jealousy, but cursed him with her words, “if you have an ounce of morality left in you, an ounce of psychological health, you’ll be impotent for the next twenty years.”<sup>cxxiv</sup>

After 19 years of commitment, Barbara was also ejected from the Collective after commenting on Rand’s “deteriorating mental state” and “increasingly reckless behavior.”<sup>cxxv</sup> Rand informed her followers of her break with the Brandens in *The Objectivist*:

Nathaniel Branden and Barbra Branden are no longer associated with this magazine, with me or with my philosophy.

I have permanently broken all personal, professional and business associations with them, and have withdrawn from them the permission to use my name in connection with their commercial, professional, intellectual or other activities.

I hereby withdraw my endorsement of them and of their future works and activities. I repudiate them, totally and permanently, as spokesmen for me or for Objectivism.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

With this letter, Rand demanded followers “choose a side.” By 1970, Rand’s inner circle dwindled down to five to ten regulars. Leonard Peikoff was the only remaining member of “the Class of ’43.”

Barbara and Nathaniel Branden introduced Leonard Peikoff Rand to his guru when he was 17 years old. Peikoff was Barbara’s younger first cousin. After the Branden-break, Ayn Rand named Peikoff her legal and intellectual heir. He inherited \$750,000, the publishing rights and royalties from Rand’s titles, and the responsibility of preserving Objectivist ideas after Rand died in 1982.<sup>cxxvii</sup> In 1985, Peikoff established the Ayn Rand Institute and served as the first chairman of the board.

By the time Peikoff was named “intellectual heir,” the number of Objectivist skeptics overshadowed the circle of believers. After Rand passed, few members of the original Collective accepted him as a legitimate leader and the Collective ceased to exist. Therefore, the same level of authority over Objectivism that NBI claimed was not successfully routinized the second time around at ARI.

The movement was vulnerable to fractioning and began to further deteriorate in the late 1980s when Peikoff asserted that Objectivism is a closed system. David Kelley, a member of Rand’s Collective, fundamentally disagreed with this notion and founded the Institute of Objectivist Studies, now the Atlas Society, which treats Objectivism as an open system.

Peikoff has since left ARI but is still prominently involved in the organization. ARI has disavowed various students of Objectivism and rejects commentary on Rand's ideas by those who do not accept her closed concept philosophy.<sup>cxxviii</sup>

## Objectivism Institutionalized

Ayn Rand failed to routinize her ideas. The Objectivist movement weakened during the transition of power from NBI to ARI leaving Rand's ideas vulnerable to claim by several groups. Initially, departure from an Objectivist orthodoxy was driven by support for the Brandens, skepticism about Rand's mental state, or commitment to fostering an evolving movement.<sup>14, cxxix</sup> After Rand's death, debate Objectivism as an open or closed system has led to more fracturing.

### **The Ayn Rand Institute (ARI)**

In 1985, Leonard Peikoff founded ARI with the help of Ed Snider.<sup>15</sup> Its stated mission is to “foster a growing awareness, understanding and acceptance of Ayn Rand's philosophy, Objectivism, in order to create a culture whose guiding principles are reason, rational-self-interest, individualism and laissez-faire capitalism—a culture in which individuals are free to pursue their own happiness.” The Institute maintains Ayn Rand's philosophy is a closed system and is considered by a lot of objectivists to be the most orthodox representation of the movement.

The original ARI had two main components; a network of college clubs dedicated to studying Objectivism and an essay contest.<sup>16</sup> Peikoff published several books while at the Institute and taught courses to a select group of Objectivists, including members of the Collective who were Ayn Rand's students when she died.<sup>cxxx</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> It was revealed that Ayn Rand had a Benzedrine addiction that began while she was completing *The Fountainhead* (Heller, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Ed Snider was the former chairman of Comcast Spectator, owner of the Philadelphia 76ers, and part-owner of the Philadelphia Eagles. Snider became a backer of The Atlas Society after David Kelley's break with the Ayn Rand Institute (Walker, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Five years ago, the network of student clubs became an independent organization sanctioned by ARI. The network, Students for Reason, Individualism, Value Pursuit, and Enterprise has a publication and holds conferences in conjunction with ARI (STRIVE Clubs Website).

Today the organization has expanded and has satellite campuses in Canada, Europe, Israel, and Washington, D.C. ARI offers students free books, an essay contest, and scholarships for graduate school or Objectivist learning programs. The Institute supports college clubs and runs an annual summer internship program. Additionally, it houses the Objectivist Academic Center (OAC) which provides lessons on Ayn Rand's philosophy and hosts annual conferences. ARI is also responsible for running the Ayn Rand bookstore and facilitates public lectures across the world.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

Leonard Peikoff has since left the Institute but still remains an influential part of the Objectivist movement. The Ayn Rand website, a central point of Objectivist communication, calls "Dr. Leonard Peikoff Ayn Rand's legal heir. For the last thirty years of Rand's life, he was her friend. Today he is the foremost authority on her philosophy." Since leaving ARI, Peikoff has committed to completing research and writing on methods of philosophical integration in "the West."<sup>cxxxix</sup>

Before he left ARI, Peikoff created a decisive rift in the Objectivist movement. David Kelley was a friend to Ayn Rand and was part of the Collective before her death. He even read Rand's favorite poem, "If," at her funeral.<sup>cxxxix</sup> In 1989, he authored a pamphlet called "Truth and Toleration" in response to Peikoff's claim that Objectivism is a closed system. After reading the essay, Peikoff declared Kelley an "enemy of Objectivism" and insisted that ARI end its association with him.<sup>cxxxix</sup> Several students of Objectivism left ARI and cut ties with Peikoff to join Kelley at his new "Institute of Objectivist Studies," later renamed "The Objectivist Center" and now called "The Atlas Society."

The charismatic element of the Objectivist movement is very visible in ARI's funding structure. Signing over major assets to a new religious movement is common, especially in

movements led by charismatic authorities. Guaranteeing salvation or a more prestigious position in the organization in turn for a donation is also characteristic of charismatic groups.<sup>cxxxv</sup> The Atlantis Legacy is a program that “acknowledges donors who have arranged bequests and other estate gifts to ARI.” The Institute appeals to donors by asking them to “imagine living in a culture dominated by Ayn Rand’s philosophy.” They ask “can the ‘New Intellectuals’ [contemporary Rand supporters] make enough of a difference, soon enough? The answer is unknown. The more important question that each of us must answer for ourselves is whether such a world [imagined by Rand] is worth striving for.”<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Individuals who belong to the Atlantis Legacy are celebrated at Objectivist gatherings and called “defenders of reason”—a title with sacred value to followers.

### **The Atlas Society**

After being expelled from ARI, David Kelley founded the Institute for Objectivist Studies (TOS). TOS was renamed the Objectivist Center and is now called the Atlas Society. The organization’s stated purpose is to “[promote] open Objectivism: the philosophy of reason, achievement, individualism, and freedom.” Unlike the Ayn Rand Institute, the Atlas Society is interested in engaging in debates and discussion with individuals from other philosophical groups and even political parties. It is one of few Objectivist organizations willing to engage with and endorse libertarians.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> The nature of the Society is much less intimidating than ARI and provides a more welcoming environment for individuals who are interested in Objectivism but not committed to practicing its tenets.

Nathaniel Branden joined the Atlas Society and played a part in developing its educational programs. At present, the Atlas Society is mainly an online forum with information about Ayn Rand and her philosophy. The organization website also prominently hosts discourse against closed concept Objectivism and ARI. The Society puts on annual events for Objectivists and those

interested in Ayn Rand's ideas. It is currently working to develop an education and outreach program.

## **The Libertarian Party**

The Libertarian party is most often referenced as the “real-world” application of Ayn Rand's ideas. During her lifetime, Rand vehemently opposed the association of Libertarianism with Objectivism and went so far as to call libertarians “enemies of capitalism and freedom.” ARI calls Libertarianism “a political expression of ‘anarchism,’ or ‘anarcho-capitalism’ as they often term it, and a foreign policy of rabid anti-Americanism (which they pass off as ‘non-interventionism.’”<sup>cxxxviii</sup> The Institute further goes on to say that libertarians “plagiarize Ayn Rand's non-initiation of force principle and convert it into an axiom, denying the need for relevance of philosophical fundamental—not only the underlying ethics, but also the underlying metaphysics and epistemology.”

The contemporary association between the two ideologies is likely attributed to their shared foundation in classical liberal ideas and relationships some modern libertarian figures shared with Ayn Rand. Although Rand rejected classical liberalism as foundational to Objectivism, their shared dedication to free speech, limited government, laissez-faire capitalism, and non-aggression is strong enough to unite the two in the minds of those who are not dedicated students of either philosophy.

Ayn Rand's real-life relationships with members of the modern libertarian movement is another contributing factor to the link drawn between Objectivism and Libertarianism. Before committing to developing and defending Objectivism, Rand was heavily involved in anti-collectivist political and economic circles, particularly New York based Austrian school economists.<sup>cxxxix</sup> One of her close friends from these circles was Murray Rothbard. Rothbard was

the founder of “anarcho-capitalist” theory and is a leading member in the modern libertarian movement.

The two became friends in 1954 after attending the same philosophy lecture. Rothbard joined the Collective, but soon left the movement because he found it to be an unoriginal compilation of ideas.<sup>cxl</sup> He later rejoined Rand’s inner circle after reading *Atlas Shrugged*. While part of the movement, he became increasingly involved with political activism and served as editor for *The Libertarian Forum*.<sup>cxli</sup> Less than a year after rejoining the Collective, Rothbard left again. This time over a disagreement about the merit of anarchism. Rothbard was openly critical of Rand and her followers after the second break and called the movement a “dogmatic, personality cult.”<sup>cxlii</sup>

John Hospers, who would go on to become the first Libertarian presidential candidate, was a friend of Rand in the early 1950s. The two met while he was a philosophy professor in New York.<sup>cxliii</sup> Their relationship was turbulent because Hospers fundamentally disagreed with portions of Objectivism, but Rand regarded him as a worthy thinker. In the mid-1960s, the friendship ended after Hospers gave a public criticism about Rand’s lecture on “Art and Sense of Life.”<sup>cxliiv</sup> Hospers credits Ayn Rand for shaping the early stages of the Libertarian party and his personal political beliefs.

Today, the Cato Institute and the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) are two of the most powerful libertarian think tanks. Leonard Read, founder of FEE, corresponded with Ayn Rand in several letters. He would ask her to review articles he and his associates wrote for the *National Review*. In the beginning of their communication, the two shared a positive relationship. However, in 1946 Rand reads an article published by Read that does not include edits she sent him and scorns him by calling him an “advocate for nationalization.” In a letter sent later that year to

her friend Rose, Rand states she and Read were “‘almost’ friends” but went on to say that there is “no excuse or forgiveness [...] possible. The mistake [publication of Read’s article without Rand’s edits] is too terrible and the principles betrayed are too important.”<sup>cxlv</sup> Rand and Read never spoke again. Today, FEE calls Rand “a meaningful intellectual influence over free-market thought in the second half of the twentieth century.”<sup>cxlvi</sup>

The Cato Institute, founded by Ed Crane, Murray Rothburg, and Charles Koch, is one of the most influential organizations in Washington. Members of the organization are leading Libertarian thinkers and politicians. In its founding, the institute did not associate with ARI or Objectivism due to the Rothburg-Rand conflict. However, the organizations have developed a relationship since John Allison—a former ARI board member—was nominated to be president of Cato in 2012.<sup>cxlvii</sup> This association is the closest between the Objectivist orthodoxy and Libertarian Party.

Rand owes a great deal of her contemporary fame to the Libertarian Party. Despite the early popularity of her novels, the resurgence of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* sales are in large part due to the rising power of the Libertarian party. Rand’s popularity in media and book sales peaked in 2012 after a period of decline.<sup>cxlviii</sup> This was the same year that Gary Johnson, Libertarian Party presidential candidate, gained one percent of the popular vote. His popularity indicated increased resistance against the Obama administration and republican conservative values.<sup>cxlix</sup> Johnson included references to Ayn Rand throughout his campaign platform and public speeches.<sup>cl</sup> The correlation between the rise of Ayn Rand’s popularity and the Libertarian Party under Johnson is a likely causal correlation.

## The Republican Party

Ayn Rand detested Republicans as much as she did Libertarians. However, before she wrote *The Fountainhead*, Rand worked for republican Wendell Willkie's presidential campaign. By the time Regan was elected, Rand had completely rejected American politics. Today, it is most likely that one hears Rand's name or reads about Objectivism because of a Republican.

Conservative celebrities, politicians, and media outlets praise Rand as a top political philosopher. Paul Ryan said of the founder of Objectivism, "Ayn Rand more than anyone else did a fantastic job of explaining the morality of capitalism, the morality of individualism." Clarence Thomas "requires his law clerks to watch *The Fountainhead*, and has said 'I tend really to be partial to Ayn Rand.'" Rush Limbaugh calls Rand a "brilliant writer and novelist."<sup>cli</sup> "Donald Trump named Ayn Rand as his favorite writer, and *The Fountainhead* as his favorite book."<sup>clii</sup>

Objectivism became prominent in the Republican Party when Ronald Regan nominated Alan Greenspan as chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve in 1987. Greenspan and Rand had been friends for over thirty years by then. As a member of the Collective, Greenspan contributed several essays to Rand's book *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* and wrote for *The Objectivist Newsletter*. When he was sworn in as Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, Rand accompanied him to the White House.<sup>cliii</sup> During his time as Chairman, Greenspan maintained his commitment to Objectivism but stated he had to "make compromises" because the United States "does not have a central bank with a gold standard" to work with.<sup>cliv</sup> He was criticized by other Objectivists for his complicity with "anti-free market" actions.<sup>clv</sup>

Unlike Libertarians, Republicans do not share with Objectivists the same beliefs about laissez-faire economics, individual liberty, or the separation of religion and government. The connection between the Republican Party and Ayn Rand puzzles members of both camps. Rand

called conservatives “futile, impotent and, culturally, dead”<sup>clvi</sup> and called Republican efforts to deregulate “unenforceable, uncompliant, unjudicable mess of contradictions.”<sup>clvii</sup> Some Republicans who have studied Rand’s philosophy beyond her novels criticize her rejection of altruism as a blow to Christianity and the integrity of their party.<sup>clviii</sup> I posit that Rand’s relevance in the Republican party is solely due to her compelling and easily understood statements about increasing individual liberty and protecting “persecuted” businessmen.

In 2009, President Obama began taking steps toward implementing the Affordable Care Act. The legislation stimulated intense anti-socialist commentary from conservatives and inspired the radical conservative Tea Party Movement. This new populist organization was interested in decreasing government spending, reducing the national debt, cutting taxes, opposing universal healthcare, and protecting their interpretation of the constitution. The movement did not often engage in conversation about social issues, but most Tea Partiers support traditional Judeo-Christian social values.<sup>clix</sup> Tea Party protest signs read “Who is John Galt?” “Atlas Will Shrug,” and “Free Markets, Not Freeloaders.”<sup>clxi</sup> These signs and the people who carried them engaged 10 percent of the American population with their anti-collectivist message.<sup>clxii</sup>

## Conclusion

In response to opposition from the Tea Party in 2012, Obama said “Ayn Rand is one of those things that a lot of us, when were 17 or 18 and feeling misunderstood, we’d pick up [...] then, as we got older, we realize that a world in which we’re only thinking about ourselves and not thinking about anybody else...that that’s a pretty narrow vision. It’s not one that, I think, describes what’s best for America.”<sup>clxiii</sup> Shortly after, Paul Ryan told the National Review that since endorsing Ayn Rand he has “[rejected] her philosophy,” calling it “an atheist philosophy” that “reduces human interactions down to mere contracts” and is “antithetical to [his] worldview.”<sup>clxiv</sup>

Perhaps Ryan had only known Rand’s ideas through *Atlas Shrugged*, the book that for a decade, he called fundamental to his political career. Maybe Ryan had not learned atheism, non-initiation of force, contractual relationships, and self-interest were central Objectivist principles, and once he did he realized he disagreed.<sup>clxv</sup> Or maybe he still values Ayn Rand’s ideas but publicly condemned them to secure his political career. Ryan’s revocation is relevant because it reveals the power Rand maintains in American memory. Her ideas are strong enough to inspire a political career, and connote egoist and atheist radicalism strong enough to destroy one.

Additionally, Paul Ryan’s comments on Ayn Rand illustrate the common appropriation of Ayn Rand’s thought in Right-wing thinking. Jennifer Barnes discusses this phenomenon in her novel *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* by claiming that conservatives have found they “can use the parts of Rand they want and not engage the rest.” She and others argue that conservative groups “misuse” or misinterpret Objectivism to substantiate their ideals because there are few contemporary works of art in popular culture that portray conservative values. Further, that it is possible for people to dissociate in Rand’s literature, her radical from her easily understood moral defense of laissez-faire capitalism and self-interest.<sup>clxvi</sup>

Theories following this form make sense, especially considering *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* are still two of the most read books in America. However, they neglect to assess the popularity and relevance of Rand's non-fiction works in which her radicalism is almost impossible to dismiss. Further, they fail to account for the implications of the full-fledged Objectivist movement that existed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When Ayn Rand is assessed as a charismatic leader who created a new religious movement that penetrated popular culture, her legacy and contemporary political relevance is better understood. Rand captivated audiences and made her ideas known with energetic lectures and compelling novels. However, was unable to routinize an iteration of closed system Objectivism that sustains a unified orthodoxy. After Ayn Rand died, the Objectivist movement was fragmented and weak, but this allowed various political figures to claim elements of Rand's ideas and further entrench her influence in American memory.

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